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UNION CABINET APPROVES SCHEMES, PROJECTS WORTH ₹1.74 LAKH CRORE

The decisions include increasing the allocation for the Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme on fertilisers for the 2026 Kharif season to ₹41,533.81 crore

₹13,000 CRORE FOR JAIPUR METRO 2ND PHASE

The Union cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also cleared upward cost revision from ₹43,129 crore to ₹79,459 crore for the HPCL Rajasthan Refinery project at Pachpadra in Balotra district, two hydroelectric projects in Arunachal Pradesh worth ₹40,000 crore, and the second phase of Jaipur Metro (42 km) with an outlay of ₹13,000 crore | P9

FERTILISER SUBSIDY INCREASE IN VIEW OF WAR

- Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the ₹4,317 cr rise in fertiliser subsidy is in view of higher global prices
- Vaishnaw noted that the ongoing situation in West Asia has had a direct bearing on fertiliser supply chains, particularly with key inputs such as potash and sulphur-based fertilisers sourced from the region

12%

INCREASE IN PHOSPHATE, POTASH SUBSIDY COMPARED TO THE YEAR-AGO PERIOD

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

TENUOUS TRUCE

BOTH SIDES FIRE MISSILES DESPITE CEASEFIRE; U.S. CLAIMS IT WILL WORK WITH IRAN TO 'DIG UP' ENRICHED URANIUM

AGENCIES @ New Delhi

IRAN, the United States and Israel agreed to a two-week ceasefire in an 11th-hour deal brokered by Pakistan that headed off US President Donald Trump's threat to unleash a bombing campaign to destroy Iranian civilization. But hours after the announcement, Iran and Gulf Arab countries reported new attacks Wednesday.

It was not clear if the strikes would scuttle the deal, which US Vice President J D Vance called "fragile". President Trump is sending a team led by Vance to Pakistan for talks with Iran following the ceasefire. Special envoy Steve Witkoff and the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner are also in that team.

Iran said the deal would allow it to formalise its new practice of charging ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial transit lane for oil. The plan allows for both Iran and Oman to charge ships, according to a regional official directly involved in the truce talks. The official said Iran would use the money it raises from the toll for rebuilding its infrastructure.

Israel backed the US ceasefire with Iran, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the deal does not cover fighting against Hezbollah and attacks on Lebanon, large parts of which were bombed Wednesday.

DAY 40 | WAR WATCH

The fate of Iran's missile and nuclear programmes, elimination of which were end goals for US and Israel in going to war, also remained unclear. Trump said the US would work with Iran to remove buried enriched uranium, though Iran didn't confirm it.

Shortly after the ceasefire announcement, Bahrain, Israel, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all issued warnings about incoming missiles from Iran. That fire stopped for a time, then hostilities appeared to restart. A short time later, the United Arab Emirates' air defences fired at an incoming Iranian missile barrage. Kuwait's military forces, meanwhile, responded to an "extensive wave" of drone attacks. Saudi Arabia said it intercepted nine drones.

Pakistan's prime minister Shehbaz Sharif urged restraint after reports of ceasefire violations. This came after Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi raised "ceasefire violations" by Israel with Pakistani mediators on Wednesday. China, Russia, the UK, India and all EU nations lauded the peace initiative. P12

IRAN'S REPORTED CHARTER OF DEMANDS

1. Non-aggression from the US
2. Acceptance of Iran's nuclear enrichment programme
3. Lifting of all primary and secondary sanctions and resolutions against Iran
4. End of all resolutions against Iran at the IAEA
5. End of all resolutions against Iran by the UN Security Council
6. Full Iranian control over Strait of Hormuz via its armed forces
7. Hormuz toll to raise funds for compensation for damage suffered during the war
8. Withdrawal of US forces from all bases in the region
9. Release of all Iranian assets frozen abroad
10. UNSC resolution making any deal binding

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

A US official said Wednesday the 10-point ceasefire plan published by Iran is not the same set of conditions agreed to by the White House for pausing the war. "The document reported by media outlets is not the working framework," the senior official said on condition of anonymity. The statement adds to concerns over the fragility of the truce declared late Tuesday. Trump had said in his declaration of a two-week truce for further negotiations that "we received a 10-point proposal from Iran, and believe it is a workable basis on which to negotiate." Iranian state media then published its own 10-point plan. These items would run contrary to Washington's public statements about what it wants Iran to do.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with his Bangladesh counterpart Khalilur Rahman during a meet in Delhi | PTI

Delhi-Dhaka dialogue signals measured thaw

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

IN a bid to reset ties after months of strain, India and Bangladesh on Wednesday signalled a measured thaw, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Bangladeshi counterpart Khalilur Rahman agreeing to explore new proposals to deepen bilateral cooperation through existing institutional mechanisms, even as the Bangladesh side reiterated its request to extradite former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, both sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal.

"Pleased to host FM Khalilur Rahman of Bangladesh and his delegation this afternoon. We discussed strengthening our bilateral relationship in its various facets. Also exchanged views on regional and global developments. Agreed to remain in close touch," Jaishankar said in a post after the meeting.

An External Affairs Ministry statement highlighted India's intent to rebuild engagement, and said "External Affairs Minister reiterated India's desire to engage constructively with the new Government and further strengthen bilateral ties. The two sides agreed to explore proposals for deepening the partnership through the relevant bilateral mechanisms. Follow-on official meetings are expected to take place at an early date." It added that both sides also "exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest" and agreed to undertake consultations on key bilateral issues.

A statement issued by Bangladesh outlined the scope of the high-level engagement. "Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman met Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Oil and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in New Delhi today," with Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Humayun Kabir and High Commissioner Riaz Hamidullah also present. It added that the delegation also held talks with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval shortly after arriving in the capital.

Dhaka also outlined its policy direction under the new leadership.

India urges lasting peace, pushes for Ukraine momentum

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Wednesday welcomed the ceasefire between the United States and Iran, expressing hope that the pause in hostilities would pave the way for lasting peace in West Asia and potentially reinvigorate diplomatic efforts to find peace in Ukraine conflict. The External Affairs Ministry said: "We welcome the ceasefire reached and hope that it will lead to a lasting peace in West Asia. As we have continuously advocated earlier, de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy are essential to bring an early end to the ongoing conflict."

Highlighting the broader consequences of the conflict, the statement added: "The conflict has already caused immense suffering to people and disrupted global energy supply and trade networks. We expect that unimpeded freedom of navigation and global flow of commerce would prevail through the Strait of Hormuz."

India, which has long-standing economic and strategic stakes in the region, remains particularly concerned about disruptions to maritime trade routes. The Strait of Hormuz, a critical artery for global oil shipments, has been at the centre of escalating tensions, raising alarm in New Delhi over energy security and the safety of millions of Indian nationals living across West Asia.

Despite sustained military attacks, Iran has demonstrated continued capability to strike regional targets using missiles and drones. Its leadership has also weathered both external attacks and internal unrest without visible signs of collapse. The truce itself was announced shortly before a planned escalation. US President Donald Trump said the agreement followed conversations with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Asim Munir, a claim echoed by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. The ceasefire has raised cautious optimism globally.

daCunha/AB/1094

TIME TO ACT ON WOMEN'S QUOTA

At the special sitting of Parliament commencing April 16, MPs must approach the bill to advance women's reservation with a sense of responsibility and purpose, writes **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, adding it is a moment to rise above differences and act with unity | P9

SABARIMALA CASE

Court can decide if a religious practice is superstition, says SC

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday said that it has the powers to strike down religious practices or superstitions—even if they are rooted in faith—if they violate public order, health and morality. A nine-judge Constitutional bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, hearing a batch of review pleas challenging the Sabarimala judgment, rejected the Centre's submission that a secular court can't decide on superstitions.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that even if a practice is superstitious, it is not for the court to determine that. "Under Article 25(2)(b) of the Constitution, it is for the legislature to step in and enact a reform law," he said, while stressing that 'constitutional morality' cannot be a ground for judicial review to decide essential religious practices and beliefs.

The bench categorically clarified that it doesn't agree with the line that the legislature has the 'last word' in such matters, stressing that courts cannot shy away from testing contentious practices against constitutional principles.

The bench also questioned how persons who are not devotees of Lord Ayyappa could challenge a centuries-old temple custom in the top court. The Supreme Court had in 2018 struck down the restriction on the entry of women in the age group of 10-50 years to the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple, based on a public interest litigation filed by an organisation named Indian Young Lawyers Association.

Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said two previous Supreme Court verdicts on decriminalisation of consensual gay sex and adultery provisions based on the doctrine of constitutional morality were "not a good law".

Questions on locus

The bench asked how persons who are not Ayyappa devotees could challenge a temple custom. "Why should this court concern with a non-devotee?" asked Justice BV Nagarathna

BATTLE ROYALE IN THREE STATES

Assembly elections **April 9**

Counting: **May 4**

KERALA

140 seats: Single phase

2.71 cr Total voters

883 Candidates

30,495 Polling stations

2021 RESULT (TOTAL SEATS: 140)

LDF - **99 seats** UDF - **41 seats** 2021 turnout **77.9%**

ASSAM

126 seats Single phase

2.49 cr Total voters

1,100 Candidates

2021 RESULT (TOTAL SEATS: 126)

NDA - **75 seats** Grand Alliance **50 seats**

PUDUCHERRY

30 seats: Single phase

9.44 lakh Total voters

2021 RESULT (TOTAL SEATS: 30)

NDA - **16 seats** | UPA - **8 seats**

Independents - **6 seats**

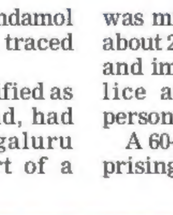
2021 voter turnout **83.4%**

D'gere South, Bagalkot bypolls today | P4

Kerala girl missing in C'magaluru hills

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Chikkamagaluru

A Class 10 student from Kerala has gone missing in the Chandradrona Hill ranges in Chikkamagaluru district, prompting an intensive multi-agency search operation, officials said on Wednesday.



The incident comes days after a woman from Kerala, Sharanya, who went missing in the Tadiandamol hills near Madikeri, was traced safely after four days.

The missing girl, identified as **Srinanda** from Palakkad, had travelled to Chikkamagaluru with her family as part of a tourist group. She went missing near Manikyadhara waterfalls in the Bababudangiri Hills on Tuesday evening.

According to officials, a group of around 40 tourists, including Srinanda's family, was visiting scenic spots in the hill range. Srinanda got separated from the group around 5.20 pm and went missing near the waterfalls.

Her family realised she was missing only after climbing about 280 steps away from the site and immediately alerted the police and Forest Department personnel.

A 60-member rescue team comprising personnel from the police, Forest Department, Fire and Emergency Services, and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) launched a search operation on Tuesday evening. Teams used thermal drone cameras and continued the search till late in the night, but could not trace her. The operation resumed early Wednesday morning, but there has been no breakthrough so far.

Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Dayama said search teams were combing the hill slopes using thermal drones. "Efforts are on to trace the girl at the earliest. We are also verifying the call records of her mobile phone," he said. Family members and local residents are anxiously awaiting her safe return. P6

RBI HOLDS REPO RATE, GOVERNOR HINTS AT LONG TIME PAUSE | P13

II PU RESULTS OUT TODAY

The results sheets will be available at respective colleges of students from 3 pm. Students can also enter their login details on karresults.nic.in to check their results and download markscards at Digilocker. Those who score low marks can appear for Exam-2, which will likely commence from April 25 to May 9 | P2

RISING CONFLICT

Sterilization of wild animals to check nos? It's an idea

BOSKY KHANNA @Bengaluru

FOREST Minister Eshwar B Khandre on Wednesday said there is a need to think about sterilization of select wild animals, in the wake of increasing man-animal conflict and deaths.

He said there is a rise in animal population and a need to save human lives. Acknowledging the need for a detailed discussion and public debate before taking any final decision, he claimed that sterilization will be temporary, for around 1-2 years. A detailed report will be prepared before appealing to the Supreme Court, where the matter is being heard.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Khandre said it is only a germ of an idea, which is being considered. He said the government was giving serious thought to voluntary relocation of tribals and forest dwellers. A list of all people who have shown interest in relocating is being prepared and it will be discussed with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, as it involves financial support. The relocation project will help expand the forest area for animals and help in conflict mitigation.

Forest department officials said the immuno-contraception programme was being discussed with the minister for only elephants and leopards, which are outside forest areas.

CONTINUED ON: P7

EXPRESS READ

EC eye on guarantees clear case of bias: CM

Bengaluru: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has accused the Election Commission of India of "bias" after it sought details on the guarantee schemes in Davanagere and Bagalkot districts, where bypolls are scheduled for Thursday. The CM said the EC had remained silent when cash transfer schemes were announced in Maharashtra and Bihar ahead of elections, calling the scrutiny a "clear case of bias" | P4

India withdraws bid to host COP33 in '28

New Delhi: India has withdrawn its offer to host the United Nations annual climate Conference of the Parties (COP33) in 2028, sources said on Wednesday. Sources said the decision has been officially communicated to the concerned. In July 2025, the Environment Ministry in India had set up a dedicated COP33 Cell to address the professional and logistical requirements for the 2028 summit.